

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 AID-05 PC-01 SCA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9071

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY

USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 375

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGUI 1690

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, CT

SUBJ: US-CAE RELATIONS - AN OVERVIEW

SUMMARY: RECENT EVENTS WHICH HAVE TROUBLED OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS ARE PART OF A CONSISTENT BUT DISTINCTIVE STYLE OF RULE WHICH BOKASSA HAS DEVELOPED OVER THE YEARS. WE ARE ITS LATEST VICTIMS. WE DO NOT THINK BOKASSA SEEKS A BREAK IN RELATIONS BUT WANTS TO MAKE THE POINT THAT HE CAN NOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED. IN DUE COURSE WE EXPECT FRIENDLY RELATIONS, WHICH MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO ASSERT, TO BE GIVEN IMPERIAL SANCTION AS WELL. IN THE MEANTIME WE SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR OTHER INCIDENTS AND POSSIBLE INTER- RUPTION OF SOME SPECIFIC PROGRAMS, THOUGH PROBABLY NOT THOSE AFFECTING AID OR PEACE CORPS. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH DESPATCH OF NOTES CONCERNING OVERFLIGHTS, MAHER DETENTION
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AND CONSULAR ACCESS, WE HOPEFULLY HAVE PUT SEVERAL CONTENTIOUS ISSUES TO REST. ALTHOUGH GOLDSMITH DETENTION PROBLEM IS STILL FAR FROM RESOLVED, IT MAY NONETHELESS BE USEFUL TO STAND BACK FROM RECENT EVENTS AND TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE BASIC DYNAMICS BEHIND THEM. SEVERAL THEMES HAVE REAPPEARED OVER AND OVER AGAIN: PREOCCUPATION WITH NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY; SENSITIVITY ABOUT RIDICULE OF AND/OR DISRESPECT FOR HEAD OF STATE; PARANOIC FEAR

OF GREAT POWER INTERFERENCE AND ESPIONAGE; STRONG SENSE OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND MAGNANIMITY; AND ALLERGY TO THE MACHINATIONS OF THE WORLD PRESS. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT NONE OF THESE PHENOMENA IS NEW IN THE CAE AND MANY CAN BE FOUND IN OTHER NEIGHBORING CENTRAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

2. WE THOUGHT SIX MONTHS AGO THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EMPIRE MIGHT LEAD TO INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF WHAT HAD BEEN ARBITRARY SYSTEM OF ONE-MAN RULE AND TO A MELLOWING OF THE REGIME. THIS HAS CLEARLY NOT HAPPENED. ALTHOUGH THERE IS STILL TALK OF IMPLEMENTING THE DEMOCRATIC PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION, THERE IS LITTLE VISIBLE PROGRESS IN THAT DIRECTION. WHATEVER IMPROVEMENT IN THE SYSTEM OCCURRED EARLY THIS YEAR HAS EVAPORATED IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS. THE PACE OF WORK IN THE MINISTRIES HAS SLACKENED AS DECISIONS ARE INCREASINGLY REFERRED TO BOKASSA AND AS ALL GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL ARE DRAWN INTO CORONATION PREPARATIONS. THE SYSTEM CONTINUES TO BE ARBITRARY AND CAPRICIOUS, BUT NOT BRUTAL. THE FACT THAT IT IS NOT BRUTAL IS NOT BECAUSE THERE ARE GUARANTEES TO PREVENT ABUSES BUT BECAUSE BRUTALITY HAS NOT BEEN NECESSARY TO KEEP THE SYSTEM UNDER CONTROL. HOWEVER, PUBLIC OR SEMI-PUBLIC HUMILIATION, USED IN BOTH THE MAHER AND RANDAL CASES REMAIN A TOOL WHICH BOKASSA USES TO ASSERT HIS AUTHORITY WITH HIS OWN MINISTERS AS WELL AS WITH FOREIGNERS.

3. BOKASSA, LIKE MANY OF HIS COHORTS IN AFRICA, IS FUNDAMENTALLY INSECURE. HIS RULE IS BASED ON TRIBAL MANIPULATION, POLITICAL
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REPRESSION, AND AN AGGRESSIVE PROJECTION OF HIS PERSONALITY. HE AND MANY OF HIS PEOPLE SUFFER FROM AN ACUTE SENSE OF INFERIORITY ARISING FROM THEIR COLONIAL PAST, THEIR NEO-COLONIAL PRESENT AND A FUTURE WITH LITTLE HOPE OF BRILLIANT ECONOMIC SUCCESS. AS BLACK AFRICANS THEY ASSUME THAT WHITE EUROPEANS ARE PATRONIZING, RACIST AND RAPACIOUS. OUTSIDE POWERS PARTICULARLY THE USSR AND THE US, BUT ALSO THE FRENCH AND CHINESE ARE SEEN AS HAVING AMBITIONS WHICH TRANSCEND ANY DIRECT BILATERAL INTERESTS. HENCE BOKASSA TENDS TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WANT TO MANIPULATE A SMALL STATE SUCH AS THE CAE TO THEIR OWN GLOBAL ADVANTAGE. HE IS PARTICULARLY ALERT TO SIGNS OF INSENSITIVITY AND ARROGANCE ON THEIR PART AS EVIDENCE OF THEIR MANIPULATIVE DESIGNS.

&. WHENEVER AN INCIDENT ARISES, IT IS SET AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND AND MAGNIFIED BY BOKASSA'S OWN EMOTIONAL AND MERCURIAL TEMPERAMENT. WHILE SOME OF HIS FEARS ARE EXAGGERATED THERE IS ALWAYS AN ELEMENT OF REALITY UNDERLYING HIS FANTASIES. MAJOR POWERS, EVEN INCLUDING THE US, HAVE FROM TIME TO TIME TAKEN SMALL COUNTRIES FOR GRANTED; THE PRESS IS CONTEMPTUOUS AND DEROGATORY; THE 1950'S AND 1960'S WERE REplete WITH EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS BY FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES.

5. THE TREATMENT WHICH IN RECENT WEEKS HAS BEEN METED OUT TO US IS TYPICAL OF BOKASSA'S STYLE. IT IS A MIXTURE OF INTIMIDATION AND CAJOLERY, IN PART CALCULATED, IN PART SPONTANEOUS AND EMOTIONAL. FOR MOST OF THE LAST TEN YEARS THE FRENCH HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO SIMILARLY CAPRICIOUS TREATMENT, BUT COMPARABLE INCIDENTS HAVE ALSO OCCURRED WITH THE ITALIANS, WEST GERMANS, RUSSIANS AND EVEN THE NIGERIANS. IN EACH CASE A MINOR INCIDENT, SUGGESTING DISRESPECT FOR THE EMPEROR, LACK OF CONCERN FOR HIS PRIORITIES, CARELESSNESS IN OBSERVING CAE LAWS, OR A PARTICULARLY VENEMOUS OR DISRESPECTFUL ARTICLE IN THE WORLD PRESS HAVE TOUCHED OFF AN EMOTIONAL INCIDENT. WE HAVE HAD THE MISFORTUNE TO HAVE THREE SUCH INCIDENTS CASCADE UPON US IN QUICK SUCCESSION: THE JOURNALISTS' ARREST; THE OVERFLIGHT CLEARANCE FLAP AND THE PEACE CORPS EXPULSION. GOLDSMITH'S BAD JUDGMENT IN FILING HIS STORY FROM
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BANGUI TRIGGERED THE OTHER EVENTS.

6. IN THE PAST THE SCRIPTS HAVE BEEN BROADLY SIMILAR: AN INCIDENT IS FOLLOWED BY AN ARREST OR DETENTION, A PUBLIC OR SEMI-PUBLIC CONFRONTATION WITH BOKASSA, WHO AT FIRST IS ANGRY, LATER CONCILIATORY AND FINALLY RELEASE OR EXPULSION. THE DENOUMENT OF SUCH INCIDENTS OFTEN TAKES MONTHS; FRENCH DETAINEES FOR INSTANCE

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P 091100Z AUG 77

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AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY
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HAVE BEEN HELD THREE OR FOUR MONTHS. ALL HAVE ULTIMATELY BEEN RELEASED, THOUGH SOMETIMES ONLY AFTER THE FRENCH PRESIDENT PRIVATELY, BUT DIRECTLY, INTERVENED WITH BOKASSA. WHERE ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN CLOSED DOWN (E.G. THE FRENCH CONSULATE IN 1973) THEY HAVE EVENTUALLY BEEN PERMITTED TO REOPEN WITH BUSINESS AS USUAL. BUT IN THE PROCESS BOKASSA HAS BEEN ABLE TO MAKE THE POINT THAT HE CALLS THE SHOTS, AND CAN MAKE EVEN HIS CLOSEST FRIEND AND SUPPORTER BEND TO HIS WILL. SYMBOLICALLY AND PRACTICALLY THIS HAS GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR HIM AND REINFORCES HIS SELF-IMAGE AS THE POWERFUL CHIEF AND LEADER OF HIS PEOPLE.

7. WE ARE NOW CAUGHT UP IN THE MIDST OF A CLASSIC BOKASSA SCENARIO SOME ELEMENTS OF WHICH HAVE PLAYED THEMSELVES OUT WHILE OTHERS REMAIN UNRESOLVED. ALMOST IRRESPECTIVE OF HOW THE GOLDSMITH CASE IS RESOLVED, A CLOUD HAS BEEN CONSCIOUSLY PLACED OVER OUR RELATIONS. WE ARE BEING WARNED NOT TO TAKE THE CAE FOR GRANTED. BOKASSA WILL CHOOSE THE MOMENT TO SIGNAL OUR RETURN TO FAVOR;
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IT MAY NOT COME FOR SOME TIME. IN THE INTERIM THERE WILL BE A CERTAIN DISTANCE, PERHAPS FURTHER INCIDENTS AND A CAMPAIGN TO KEEP US ON THE DEFENSIVE. HE WILL RETAIN THE OVERALL INITIATIVE, FOR EVEN IF WE CHOOSE TO TAKE COUNTER MEASURES HE RETAINS THE ABILITY TO REACT TO THEM IN UNPREDICTABLE WAYS WHICH WOULD KEEP US UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE LIKELY RESULTS OF OUR EFFORTS.

8. WHAT THEN ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR POLICIES? BOKASSA DOES NOT APPEAR TO WANT A PERMANENT BREAK WITH THE US. HIS MINISTERS AND SENIOR OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO DOWNPLAY THE IMPORTANCE OF RECENT EVENTS AND INSIST THE GOCAE WANTS CLOSE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH US. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE REQUESTS FOR AID (MOST RECENTLY A REQUEST TO TRAIN MAJORETTES FOR THE CORONATION). BOKASSA WELCOMES OUR AID AND SEEMS TO WANT OUR ASSISTANCE. HE NEEDS OUR SUPPORT AS AN IMPORTANT INGREDIENT OF HIS OVERALL BALANCED FOREIGN POLICY. HE, HOWEVER, MAY ALSO TAKE US FOR GRANTED AND MAY ASSUME THAT WE ATTACH GREATER IMPORTANCE TO THE RELATIONSHIP THAN WE IN FACT DO. THIS ASSUMPTION EMBOLDENS HIM TO TAKE RASH ACTIONS AND TO THINK HE CAN MANIPULATE US. HE KNOWS WE CAN NOT EASILY OUTMANEUVER HIM.

9. IN THIS SITUATION OUR TACTICS MUST BE A MIXTURE OF FIRMNESS AND CONCILIATION, AVOIDING RANCOR AND ACCUSATION WHICH HE CAN USE AGAINST US. WE MUST BE SCRUPULOUSLY CAREFUL TO OBSERVE THE LAWS OF THE COUNTRY AND RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO BE DERISIVE OF THE MANY FOIBLES AND IDEOSYNCRACIES OF HIS MIKADOESQUE REGIME. THIS WILL REQUIRE THE PATIENCE OF JOB AND A WILLINGNESS TO WORK AWAY

AT OUR PROGRAMS UNOBTRUSIVELY WITH THE GOAL OF HELPING MEET THE BASIC NEEDS OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN PEOPLE. IN TIME THE NATURAL FRIENDLINESS OF THE COUNTRY AND ITS RULERS WILL REASSERT ITSELF. UNTIL THEN WE MAY FIND OURSELVES HARASSED AND SOME OF OUR PROGRAMS INTERRUPTED. (THE CANCELLATION OF THE PEOPLE TO PEOPLE BASKETBALL VISIT IS A CASE IN POINT).

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10. THE PERIOD OF GREATEST SENSITIVITY WILL BE THE NEXT FOUR MONTHS. NERVES ARE ALREADY FRAYED OVER PREPARATIONS FOR THE CORONATION. PRESS COVERAGE, EVEN WITHOUT WHATEVER STORIES RANDAL AND GOLDSMITH EVENTUALLY WRITE, WILL BE MOCKING OR CRITICAL. WE MAY BE SEEN AS THE DEUS EX MACHINA BEHIND THEM, WITH ALL THAT THIS COULD ENTAIL BY WAY OF REINFORCED SUSPICIONS OF OUR MOTIVES. THE MONTHS AHEAD ARE LIKELY TO BE UNCERTAIN ONES FOR CAE-US RELATIONS.

11. EVEN IF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS SURVIVE THE NEXT FEW MONTHS RELATIVELY INTACT, SIMILAR FLARE-UPS WILL PROBABLY OCCUR IN THE FUTURE. OUR VISIBILITY AND PRESENCE IN THIS PRO-WESTERN COUNTRY HAVE GROWN OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS AS WE HAVE DEVELOPED A SERIES OF PROGRAMS OF DIRECT BENEFIT TO THE RURAL POOR. WE CANNOT EXPECT TO CARRY ON THESE PROGRAMS WITHOUT OCCASIONAL INCIDENTS, SOME OF WHICH WILL REACH BOKASSA AND PRODUCE THE TYPE OF REACTION WE ARE WITNESSING NOW. WE DO NOT THINK THAT BOKASSA WILL WISH TO MAKE CONTINUATION OF THESE PROGRAMS IMPOSSIBLE AND HENCE DO NOT SUGGEST THAT WE NEED REDUCE OUR PROGRAMS. THEY ARE STILL VERY MUCH WELCOMED AND NEEDED. WE SHOULD, HOWEVER, BE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS IN EXPANDING THEM MUCH BEYOND THEIR PRESENT MODEST LEVEL.
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